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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: RAID ON OFFICES OF HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATES LIKELY A
GRAB FOR DESIRABLE PROPERTY

Classified By: POL Bob Patterson for reasons 1.4(B/D).

11. (C) Summary: A late-night raid on the offices housing well-known human rights figures, Karina Moskalenko and Lev Ponomarev, was likely an attempt to seize property in a desirable part of Moscow. The description of events fits an increasingly common phenomenon in Moscow of wealthy Russians hiring thugs to intimidate renters into giving up their apartments or office space so that the property can be renovated and taken over by new owners. Because of the high profiles of Moskalenko and Ponomarev, whose organizations occupy office space adjacent to each other, the raid has drawn the attention of other human rights organizations, the media and members of the city and state Dumas. End summary.

Evening Raid

12. (C) At approximately 1100 p.m. on April 10, a group of civilians consisting of three Russians and about 20 Tajiks showed up at the office of Karina Moskalenko, a well-known human rights attorney who has represented Mikhail Khodorkovskiy and presented numerous cases before the European Court of Human Rights. The "raiders," who were likely expecting to find an empty office, instead found one of Moskalenko's employees who was working late on a case that needed to be filed before the European Court of Human Rights the next day. Moskalenko's office is located in a fashionable, high-rent neighborhood in the center of Moscow. The raiders essentially took the employee hostage after removing the office's back steel door using welding equipment in order to gain access. The raiders were attempting to close off access between the two offices so that the wealthy owner of the apartment next door could expand into Moskalenko's office space. They claimed the person who hired them had purchased the property occupied by Moskalenko for one million dollars in order to provide an apartment for his son.

13. (C) Moskalenko's employee was able to call Ponomarev during the incident who in turn called radio station Ekho Moskvyy and other human rights activists. Details of the incident were recounted to us by Ponomarev on April 10. Ponomarev told us he arrived on the scene soon after he received the call. The police arrived shortly thereafter, he said, but they were uninterested in doing anything about the incident despite the fact that the raiders were still on the premises. About 20-30 human rights activists showed up on the street outside of the office to lend assistance, and one particularly strong activist climbed a drainage pipe in order to gain entry through a second floor window into Moskalenko's office. One of the raiders tried to push him out of the window and even this did not draw a reaction from the police, Ponomarev said. A second group of police officers showed up but also did nothing and later a policewoman was sent but did

not ask questions or take down any information. Ponomarev was told he could go to the police station to file a report but he refused to leave the property for fear he would not be allowed back in.

¶4. (C) Ponomarev told us that approximately three weeks ago, two police officers showed up unannounced and appeared to be surveying the office. When Ponomarev questioned them, they claimed to be the local beat police just doing their job. Ponomarev told them he knew the local police who patrol the neighborhood. The police officers responded that the regular patrol was on vacation. Ponomarev and Moskalenko have rented their respective offices since 1999. While Ponomarev's premises, which are on the first floor are legally zoned as an office, Moskalenko's office on the second floor is zoned for residential occupancy. Moskalenko's attempts to change the zoning of her office space have run aground in red tape.

Reaction and speculation about motive

¶5. (C) Interest in the incident has been high. Yabloko City Duma Deputy Sergey Mitrokhin had interceded in an attempt to speed the re-zoning of Moskalenko's premises. State Duma Deputy Ilya Ponomarev, a member of the Just Russia faction, called Lev Ponomarev (no relation), for details during the meeting with us. Lev Ponomarev had an interview with Channel 3 scheduled for later in the day.

¶6. (C) Moskalenko told us she believed the raid was an attempt to intimidate her but for what exact reason she was unable to say. Ponomarev drew a political connection and said that because he is such a well-known figure, the raid could not have happened without someone at a high level sanctioning it. Neither linked the incident to recent

comments by Federal Security Service (FSB) Director Nikolay Patrushev, who on April 8 accused foreign NGOs of assisting terrorists. The Moscow Helsinki Committee's Lyudmila Alekseyeva told us Patrushev's comments are nothing new. She attributed such comments to public defamation of NGOs coming "into fashion." In the past Patrushev has accused NGOs of receiving foreign funds in order to foment revolution in post-Soviet countries and he has linked NGOs and foreign intelligence services.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: While Ponomarev, in particular, has done many things to raise the ire of authorities including in recent days calling for an investigation into law enforcement treatment of a group of young boys who were caught drinking outside a metro station, the motivation behind the raid more likely was location, location, location. As wealthy Russians seek to live in desirable neighborhoods, they go to extreme lengths to obtain the property they want.

RUSSELL